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# Identity Crisis between the Wars

## How Doctrine Shaped the Marine Corps after World War I and Vietnam

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**Abstract:** Doctrine is developed to serve as a template for military operations. The effect of doctrine is to influence how military Services and members think about, and fight, wars. In the U.S. Marine Corps, two significant doctrinal publications, the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* (1934) and *Warfighting* (1989), were written to change Service culture in a manner that reflected external and internal pressures on the Corps. This article examines these two publications against existing definitions of effective doctrine, and considers the role doctrine played in shaping Service culture in the Marine Corps using the landing manual and *Warfighting* as examples.

**Keywords:** Marine Corps, doctrine, military adaptation, Service culture, maneuver warfare, amphibious warfare, peacetime military change, drivers of military change, military operations, *Warfighting*, *Tentative Landing Operations Manual*, TLOM, professional military education

As the Vietnam War was winding down, military historian Michael Howard wrote that he was “tempted to declare that whatever doctrine the Armed Forces are working on, they have got it wrong.” He went on to argue that this was not of great concern, as even more important than having the right doctrine was having the ability to adapt when peacetime doctrine

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was applied in war. He concluded that “it is the task of military science in an age of peace to prevent the doctrine *being too badly wrong*.”<sup>1</sup>

This suggests that the characteristics of good doctrine are not only that it should be robust in practice, but also that it promote flexibility so that armies and commanders can adjust when the specifics of the doctrine prove not to be robust. For doctrine developed in an interwar period to be good enough, it must account for a range of military operations and guide militaries to build the right capabilities to meet that range. Good Service doctrine will also help define the roles and missions of an individual Service within the joint force. Implicit in the recognition of a distinction between the formulation of doctrine in an age of relative peace and its implementation is that doctrine is essentially a conceptual undertaking.<sup>2</sup> How can doctrine deal with abstracts and yet be applicable in the decidedly concrete world of warfare?

This article examines two seminal doctrinal publications of the United States Marine Corps: the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* (TLOM), developed in the early 1930s; and *Warfighting*, developed in the late 1980s. Using these two manuals as examples, the authors argue that Marine Corps doctrine has a specific style that lends itself particularly well to clearly defining its role in national defense, in part, because of a streamlined, centrally directed writing process. While each doctrine was written in response to exogenous drivers—including potential external threats and the seemingly never-ending threat to the Marine Corps as a Service distinct from the U.S. Navy or Army—each also was driven by endogenous factors as well, in particular the desire to create or change institutional identity and culture. In the case of the landing manual, Marines correctly saw the need for an amphibious doctrine that provided for education and training should the nation go to war in the Asia-Pacific, and the proponents of maneuver warfare again positioned the Marine Corps to remain viable despite the threat posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In both cases, the Marine Corps was able to create doctrine that justified its existence as a separate and distinct Service during periods of change and develop a Service culture and identity that suited its skills and heritage.

## Doctrine in History and Historical Doctrine

Just as specific doctrines discussed here have historical context, so too does the concept of doctrine; and it has evolved. The idea of doctrine, if the term denotes officially promulgated beliefs about how to fight, goes back to the Roman Empire and its infantry tactics and structure as epitomized by the phalanx and the legion. If it refers only to written doctrine, there are military manuals dating roughly to the origins of the printing press in the fifteenth century, which allowed them to become more common from that point on. Arguably, modern doctrine flows from the Napoleonic Wars with the writings of Antoine-Henri Jomini and

Carl von Clausewitz. Clausewitz in particular began a serious attempt to study and codify how the mental domain should be treated in war. Both authors influenced how militaries should fight, think, and be organized. Within this context, J. F. C. Fuller, a nineteenth-century military historian, described doctrine as “the central idea of an army . . . which to be sound must be based on the principles of war, and which to be effective must be elastic enough to admit to mutation in accordance with change in circumstances.”<sup>3</sup> As so many historians and military professionals have done, Fuller and authors like him applied their understanding of the past to understanding recent or future conflicts.

Doctrine is also about belief; it is not coincidence that the two groups that use the concept are religions and militaries. In 1903, Marshal Ferdinand Jean Marie Foch said that the regulations he published for the French military, which are in fact doctrine, were his staff’s “most sure guide, and one to be followed with sincere conviction and entire faith.”<sup>4</sup> While the vast majority of the writing in most doctrine manuals is concerned with tangibles, it is the underlying assumptions about the nature and purpose of fighting that give doctrine value and make it something to believe in, not merely to understand.

While for much of history military professionals have written and promulgated doctrine, more recently scholars in the field of strategic studies have added their voices to the conversation. Two different schools of thought on the purpose of doctrine emerged, and the authors argue that rather than presenting a dichotomy, they represent two roles for doctrine, both of which are fulfilled by Marine Corps doctrine, in general, and by the TLOM and *Warfighting*, in particular. One school is argued by Harald Høiback, who combines both academic and military experience and sees doctrine as a positive response to an external threat.<sup>5</sup> Høiback’s writing presents doctrine in realist terms, as something that is effective because it shapes behavior. In a seemingly contrasting perspective, Jan Ångström and J. J. Widén suggest that doctrine can be viewed in an entirely different way: as a source of belief and identity. These two war studies professors assert that doctrine is a normative response to an internal challenge to identity.<sup>6</sup>

To expand on Høiback’s ideas, it is important to note that he sees three ideal types of doctrine; of course, these ideals do not exist, yet each of these three types is present in almost all doctrine to some degree. As a military professional, however, Høiback focuses on the concrete (i.e., doctrine) which, from a functional perspective, serves three different purposes. First, doctrine is a tool of education. It instructs officers how to apply the skills they have acquired at the tactical level to problems at higher echelons as they advance in their careers. Doctrine represents the template of how wars ought to be fought, sometimes at the highest and most theoretical levels, but also on granular and pragmatic issues. This role for doctrine corresponds to formal ongoing education and

published best practices for all professions, and it complements apprenticeship, on-the-job learning, experience, and training.

Second, doctrine is a tool of command, in part because of its role in the intellectual formation of officers. In this sense, doctrine serves to prescribe the default actions of commanders in the field and to provide the boundaries within which they may improvise when necessary. In this capacity, doctrine makes the military predictable, which is useful for coordination within war as related to repeatable procedures and for reducing friction and counterbalancing the unpredictability of the enemy and political leadership. Third, doctrine can be a tool of change. This can be in response to new external circumstances, such as interests, alliances, or transformative technologies. It also can be in response to failure, driving conceptual changes to how to fight. The U.S. Army's FM 100-5, *Operations*, can be seen as an example of this, as an attempt to steer rapid change from the top in the wake of failure and effect a systematic change in how the Army thought about fighting.<sup>7</sup> Overall, Høiback examines doctrine through the lens of both the academic and the military professional, which focuses attention on the practical application of doctrine: fighting the next war better.

Ångström and Widén take a different tack, looking to understand doctrine's larger institutional purposes. In their article for *Journal of Strategic Studies*, they explicitly describe doctrine as religion. Doctrine provides ontological security by giving meaning to the decisions and actions required in war. Like religious doctrine, it describes reality for believers. Good doctrine, if viewed in this light, is doctrine that shapes and transmits identity. Ångström and Widén challenge the validity of evaluating doctrine by its influence on military effectiveness, because utilitarian assessment of doctrine lacks a "feedback mechanism that can provide clear and concise quality standards." If performance in war is such a feedback mechanism, it is not useful, because war is an "interactive (and often rare) phenomenon," with unknown variables, including the identity of the enemy.<sup>8</sup> Because it is hard to test doctrine under realistic circumstances, and because in a war there are too many factors to isolate doctrine in order to evaluate its quality, they suggest a constructivist framework within which to assess the degree to which doctrine as a set of beliefs shapes military identity.

Within the context of this recent work, this article incorporates elements of both schools of thought in considering the TLQM and *Warfighting*. While a monocausal explanation of military effectiveness is seldom convincing, or even defensible, the degree to which doctrine shapes behavior, and serves as a tool of education, command, and change, can in fact be measured by examining how militaries act during both peace and war. At the same time, these two manuals were written not only to change how the Corps trains for and fights wars, but also to shape its perception of warfare and of effectiveness in war.



The degree to which they shape belief and identity is therefore a significant measure of both their quality and their success.

For the purposes of this article, doctrine is either the entirety or one part of the official published, normative statements about how a military organization ought to prepare and fight for war. Official sources exclude writings by others on the same topics, however insightful, because while they do influence how the military thinks, they are external. Moreover, published sources exclude collective and received wisdom, speeches, or statements, because while they are internal, they are not necessarily coherent or binding. The term *normative* allows us to focus on the prescriptive element of doctrine, excluding descriptive writings that include the lessons learned from retrospective work. Reference to *prepare and fight* means that we have the opportunity to discuss attitudes, training, leadership in peacetime, and institutional culture, not simply the fighting of wars.

Existing theories of military change typically identify disruptive technologies, the threat of defeat, civilian intervention, and bureaucratic dynamics as drivers of change.<sup>9</sup> Without discounting the importance of these factors, this article suggests that doctrine can be an endogenous source of military change, not simply a reaction to it or an effect of it. Two Marine Corps doctrinal publications, separated by half a century, the *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* and *Warfighting* illustrate this.

### **The *Tentative Landing Operations Manual***

The *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* was written and edited by the faculty and students of the Marine Corps Schools, during the academic year 1933–34, based on a decade of an experimental, but deliberate, program of training. Drawing upon history and theory and upon the range of experience reflected among the group, they generated a document that was refined and approved by the commandant of the Marine Corps Schools and then by the Commandant of the Corps. In 1938, the manual was adopted and adapted by the U.S. Navy and became the basis for planning amphibious operations.<sup>10</sup>

The original TLOM is nearly 500 pages long, divided into five chapters, although the edition adapted and published by the Navy in 1938 includes additional chapters. The first chapter of the manual sets out the necessity for a doctrine on landing operations and the defense of territories so gained. Chapter 2 describes ship-to-shore movement and the role played in the landing by aviation, artillery, intelligence, communication, and other technical measures, such as smoke or chemicals. The third chapter (which subsequently was revised and published as the *Tentative Manual for the Defense of Advanced Bases*) describes the role of all those capabilities in sustaining and defending operations after a successful landing. Chapter 4 details how staffing must support opposed land-

ing operations. The fifth chapter addresses logistics for all of these phases, as well as the logistics for a withdrawal from an unsuccessful landing and the use of an advanced base to provide logistical support to efforts further ahead. There also are appendices addressing orders and training.

Without specifying any particular threat or theater, the manual argues that overseas war requires advanced bases; yet at the time, leadership inside and outside of the Corps understood that the Asia-Pacific region was a likely area of operations in the future. Inasmuch as the role of the Marine Corps is to advance the mission of the Navy, it must be capable both of seizing such bases and of defending them until either Army forces take over the task or the base becomes unnecessary. Advanced bases can have “most, if not all, of the characteristics of a main outlying base except permanency.”<sup>11</sup> The manual also allows, at the other end of the spectrum, for the establishment of minor bases chosen for particular advantages, which serve as stepping stones as the fleet advances toward a distant theater.

Also addressed are the peculiar intricacies of command relationships in a landing operation, in which the flag officer commanding the naval attack force (including all forces participating) and the commander of the Fleet Marine Force have overlapping areas of responsibility. A parallel with ground operations is established, in that a landing operation is, in essence, an assault that substitutes, at least in the initial actions, naval gunfire and carrier-based aviation for artillery and ground-based aviation.<sup>12</sup> While the landing force is tasked with supporting fleet operations, during a landing operation “*it must be thoroughly understood that the landing force is engaged in the main effort* and all other naval arms during that critical period are acting in support of” the landing force.<sup>13</sup>

Chapter 2 addresses the mechanics of the landing, considering variables ranging from selection of landing area, timing, and attacking simultaneously or in waves, with diagrams illustrating various shorelines and possible approaches. It includes extensive discussion of how responsibilities must be broken down in both the naval and land force components during the crucial ship-to-shore phase of the assault, and explicitly recommends close contact between the two groups and their commanders, including while in transit to the theater, to develop familiarity and improve communication during the subsequent assault. It also provides detailed, illustrated guidance for how to diagram the landing, deployment, and debarkation of personnel and materiel. While recommending extensive and explicit planning for the process of transitioning from ship to shore, however, the manual states that, since the terrain will be unfamiliar and information about the position and condition of other units will be poor, “detailed methods of executing the scheme of maneuver on shore should not be prescribed.”<sup>14</sup> Rather, subordinate commanders should be given sufficient information about their own objective and those of neighboring units, along with

as much knowledge as possible about the geography and goal of the assault, and then entrusted to use their initiative to these ends.

This chapter also addresses how naval forces in the area are to support efforts once the landing force is ashore, including communications, salvage work, and delivering additional ammunition. The manual stresses the importance of careful coordination of naval gunfire with field artillery and aviation to support the ground element with both scheduled and on-call fires. The use of aviation in all phases of the attack is addressed, as are technical details of the movement and employment of field artillery, the role of intelligence and communication, and the use of chemical weapons both against personnel and to create smoke to cover movement, particularly in the ship-to-shore movement.

Chapter 3 discusses the holding of captured bases. In the wake of Gallipoli—when the gains made by Allied forces were lost due either to failure to press the advantage or lack of reinforcements—the subject was of central importance to any attempt to craft a sustainable approach to opposed landings.<sup>15</sup> The chapter begins by discussing the types of defense best suited to various topographies, the disposition of troops and defenses, and defense against air, surface, and submarine attacks. The role of aviation in reconnaissance, communications, and repelling enemy naval forces is discussed, as is close air support in defending against an amphibious attack, building on the work of the first director of Marine Corps Aviation, then-Major Alfred A. Cunningham, among others.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, the defense against enemy aviation is included in this chapter. While chapter 3 is quite technical, without explicit implications for strategy, its treatment of aviation as part of broader doctrine was, in its context, a novelty. Moreover, the very brief chapter 4 (on staff) mandates a specific billet under the F-3 (operations officer) for naval gunfire, but not for air support.

Chapter 5 (on logistics) is another technical portion of the doctrine and includes specific guidance for various landing craft, with tables and loading diagrams. Informed by the Corps' experiences in similar missions, this material is prescriptive and detailed. Even within the discussion of logistics, though, can be found a gesture toward the complexities of sustained amphibious operations on a large scale: the manual recommends that naval personnel necessary to operate the small craft involved be integrated into teams with ground personnel as early as possible and be trained as teams. Discussion of logistics and local civilian populations reflects the reality in which this doctrine, while not developed for any identified theater, was likely to be put into practice.<sup>17</sup>

Taken together, this doctrine was particularly significant given how amphibious warfare was perceived in the wake of the First World War. Alfred T. Mahan, a then-popular naval historian whose works underpinned the Navy's strategic thought, considered joint operations to be ineffective and needlessly dangerous.<sup>18</sup> While English naval historian Sir Julian S. Corbett saw value in



naval support of military operations, he saw such activities as feasible only once command of the sea had been secured, rather than as a complement to, or requirement for, that achievement.<sup>19</sup> Influenced in part by Gallipoli, Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart, another soldier-historian, concluded in the 1930s that while fighting and landing simultaneously had always been difficult, in the face of the weaponry of the day, it was nearly impossible.<sup>20</sup> The insight that amphibious operations could enable—rather than be constrained by—the reach of naval forces, combined with the determination to develop an approach that mitigated the risk of these operations on a large scale, was transformative to a degree that is sometimes obscured by the fact that the principles espoused in the TLOM and put into effect in the Pacific theater were rapidly adopted by other militaries.

As well as the losses suffered by Allied forces in opposed landings during the First World War, another external driver was the perceived need to capture and defend advanced naval bases in future conflicts.<sup>21</sup> The concept of having Marines aboard ship, surplus to the requirements of the fighting ships themselves, was proposed by Admiral George Dewey in 1900, and Commandant Charles Heywood shortly thereafter assigned personnel to develop procedures for taking advanced bases.<sup>22</sup> While this capability was put into use in the early years of the twentieth century, as the First World War loomed on the horizon and then became the primary priority for the U.S. military, amphibious operations were given significantly less attention, with respect to doctrine, planning, and training. As early as 1920, though, the rise of Japan prompted Commandant John A. Lejeune to charge Lieutenant Colonel Earl H. Ellis with developing a plan for the Marine Corps in a future war in the Pacific, which became the basis for the Marines' role in War Plan Orange.<sup>23</sup>

Institutional pressures also drove the creation of the TLOM in the 1930s. As Assistant Commandant, Lieutenant General John H. Russell Jr. felt that the constabulary and counterrevolutionary missions with which the Corps had been associated were not a good fit for either the needs of the nation or those of the Corps. Further, since he considered an amphibious capability to be strategically vital, he proposed that the development of a manual accessible to naval officers would ensure more appropriate support for this Marine Corps' mission.<sup>24</sup> This identity balancing, in which the Corps defined for itself the need to be differentiated from the Army while maintaining both autonomy from and a connection to the Navy, is characteristic of doctrinal and institutional innovation in the decades that followed the publication of the TLOM.<sup>25</sup>

The development of a doctrine for opposed landings in the wake of the First World War reinforced an amphibious identity for the Marine Corps that had been partially forgotten by its land actions in Europe. It also marked the beginning of a distinct approach to close air support. While the Marines had used aviation as a substitute for artillery in many encounters in the 1920s,

the landing manual introduced organic support, which led in practice to low-altitude strafing and attack in support of landings.<sup>26</sup> Part of the legacy of the TLOM was to more concretely embed amphibious operations into the culture and identity of the Corps, to such an extent that a focus on other missions has arguably been hampered where those missions conflicted with this role.<sup>27</sup>

The context of the manual's creation presented many challenges for the Corps. In the interwar period, Congress cut the budget and along with it funding for the Marine Corps at a time when the number of Marines increased. Military aviation was making a transition from being a fairly auxiliary part of combat, useful chiefly for reconnaissance, to its role in World War II and after, in which it took on tremendous strategic and tactical importance. Institutionally, the Corps was in search of a new role, after decades as a constabulary force in the so-called Banana Wars and then its experience in World War I as very nearly a second land army. Under constant pressure to justify its budget, and sometimes its existence, the Corps needed a role that built upon its relationship with the Navy and made clear its different value proposition from the Army.

The TLOM contains much that is more properly characterized as a set of techniques, tactics, and procedures, rather than doctrine, but there are three major elements that address the philosophy of fighting and preparing to fight that were transformative. The first is the recognition that the ground and sea components of an amphibious attack must work together closely, not only during the operation itself, but in training, as far in advance of the operation as possible and ideally as a default. Opposed landings on a massive scale required new relationships between the land and naval commanders and between the commanders and their subordinates, which were described in the manual. Remarkably, while the role of the Corps, as stipulated in the manual, was to support the mission of the Navy during a landing, all elements present were to make the landing their highest priority—essentially a time-bound reversal of the relationship.

The second is the codification of an organic relationship between the landing force and both naval gunfire and air support. These relationships were built into the Corps' landing operations by designating staff positions for these elements, as well as mandating training together as early as possible in the planning process, ideally as a matter of routine. In the amphibious attacks of the Second World War and beyond, air and naval gunfire were key elements for all the Services; but the recognition that these elements must, in landing operations, be integrated with, and in support of, the landing forces was both a novelty at the time and the seed of the much later structural innovation in the official codification of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (often referred to as the MAGTF), finalized in 1963.

The third is the linkage drawn between opposed landings and their subse-

quent defense—one lesson of Gallipoli being that provisional gains could be quickly nullified without both an immediate push further inland and supporting forces. The landing manual includes chapters on the defense of the island or littoral area, including the logistics needed to cope with local populations and the establishment of the infrastructure needed to support naval forces in the region. These portions of the manual were later published separately, as the *Tentative Manual for the Defense of Advanced Bases* in 1936.<sup>28</sup>

## **Warfighting**

The *Warfighting* manual originated in 1989 as Fleet Marine Force Manual 1 (FMFM 1), and in 1997, it was redesignated as Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (MCDP 1). According to *Warfighting*, the document “describes the philosophy which distinguishes the U.S. Marine Corps.”<sup>29</sup> It describes the tenets of maneuver warfare, which boils down to applying strength against weakness or forcing an opponent to a weak position that can be exploited. In less than 100 pages of text, *Warfighting* describes the nature of war, the theory of war, preparation for war, and how the Marine Corps conducts war. The philosophy contained in this slim tome shapes everything from how Marines lead to the development of operational concepts that guide how the Marine Corps organizes, trains, and equips the force, at least in theory.

Maneuver warfare is an approach to warfighting concerned with the disruption of the adversary’s decision cycle, the agility of the warfighter’s decision cycle, and the exploitation of opportunities and vulnerabilities created by this mismatch. It is not confined to any particular domain or era of fighting, and it emphasizes adaptability, spontaneity, and flexibility, and accordingly requires delegating decision making to the unit or individual in contact with the adversary. This approach is built on a specific institutional culture, in which trust and the flow of information permeate the lines of communication at all levels. It also necessitates a different ethos of training, education, and thinking about war, one that emphasizes intent over explicit direction and flexibility in execution over dogged application of well-drilled tactics.

Although all of the Services include tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) as part of doctrine, in practice, the Marine Corps differentiates between TTPs and doctrine.<sup>30</sup> TTPs describe the basic blocking and tackling of operations. They are the well-drilled tasks that are orchestrated at the point of contact. Doctrine, on the other hand, allows one to create a spirit of collaboration among elements of the MAGTF to create a dilemma for the enemy.<sup>31</sup>

General James N. Mattis has often referred to doctrine as the “last refuge of the unimaginative.” In a recent interview, however, he also stressed that Marines must know doctrine cold and then improvise like a jazzman.<sup>32</sup> An unimaginative following of doctrine, for example, would have limited Task Force

58 operations to the littorals rather than 350 nautical miles from the sea, an operation Mattis executed in Afghanistan in 2001.<sup>33</sup> At the time, the doctrinal employment of a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) was up to 200 nautical miles inland. Moreover, doctrine provided little guidance when forming command relationships. Typically, the two MEUs would have been commanded by a Marine brigadier general, designated the commander, landing force, and the two Amphibious Readiness Groups (ARGs) would be commanded by a Navy rear admiral, designated the commander, amphibious task force. The two commanders would have a supported and supporting relationship. Breaking with doctrine, then-Brigadier General Mattis was placed in charge of Task Force 58, which comprised 15th MEU (Special Operations Capable or SOC) and the Peleliu ARG with the 26th MEU (SOC) and Bataan ARG.<sup>34</sup> This illustrates Mattis' assertion that "in the Marine Corps, doctrine is descriptive rather than prescriptive and the culture of the Marine Corps doesn't reward the unimaginative application of doctrine."<sup>35</sup>

The publication of *Warfighting* on 6 March 1989 marked the official adoption of maneuver warfare doctrine in the Marine Corps. *Warfighting* was a synthesis of the strategic concepts of Carl von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, written in such a way as to be meaningful for all Marines from the enlisted to the highest-ranking officers.<sup>36</sup> *Warfighting* is as much philosophy as doctrine.<sup>37</sup> In the foreword, General Alfred M. Gray Jr. wrote, "This book describes my philosophy on warfighting. It is the Marine Corps' doctrine and, as such, provides the authoritative basis for how we fight and how we prepare to fight." The ideas underpinning maneuver warfare had been circulating throughout the Corps for about a decade, spurring discussion and innovative solutions for both the practical aspects of the Corps' role among the Services, as well as its identity building in the post-Vietnam era. Gray had used maneuver warfare while he was a commander at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and by the time he signed the final document, he had become Commandant of the Marine Corps. By 1989, *Warfighting* officially dictated how the Marine Corps would approach tactics, operations, strategy, roles, and missions. *Warfighting* helped the Marine Corps regain its identity, purpose, and confidence after being battered by its Vietnam experience, where it had suffered by using attrition warfare-type tactics without having a stunning victory. The glory days of World War II had long been over, and the nation and the Corps smarted from the experience in Southeast Asia. The Marine Corps once again embraced its identity as an amphibious and expeditionary force after a protracted ground war. The Marine Corps finds itself in a similar position today as it emerges from long ground wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in his initial guidance, the current Commandant directed the Corps to "reinvigorate a Maneuver Warfare mindset for the 21st Century" and to "serve as a maritime-based expeditionary force."<sup>38</sup>

Three factors drove the formulation of maneuver warfare as codified in *Warfighting*. The first was a profound dissatisfaction with how professional military education had failed officers during Vietnam.<sup>39</sup> The heavy emphasis on attrition-type warfare had ill prepared that generation of officers. In Vietnam, the military tried to win the war “by accumulating tactical victories, accepting battle wherever and whenever offered.” In the end, that approach failed.<sup>40</sup> In the period immediately after Vietnam, the Marine Corps concentrated on recruiting the right people and getting its equipment back in shape. By the mid-1970s, the Marine Corps was focused on operations, and maneuver warfare ideas began to surface.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the Marine Corps sought to return to its amphibious roots after fighting ashore for a decade.

The second factor driving the development of maneuver warfare in the Marine Corps was the Cold War. In 1981, the year Major General Gray took command of the 2d Marine Division, the United States was engaged in a Cold War with the Soviet Union, and the Marine Corps anticipated fighting against a numerically superior enemy if that war turned hot. General Gray realized that an attritionist approach to fighting the Soviets or their proxies was a recipe for disaster. In a letter to the division, he wrote, “Historically, maneuver warfare has been the means by which smaller but more intelligently led forces have achieved victory.”<sup>42</sup> In a 1982 address to the officers of the division, General Gray stated maneuver warfare was the official doctrine of the 2d Marine Division.<sup>43</sup> His declaration was striking, because the Marine Corps had not fully embraced maneuver warfare. In 1983, the Marine Corps responded to a House Armed Services Committee query on maneuver warfare by stating that the “‘Marine Corps does not subscribe to any exclusive formula or recipe for warfare,’ but that ‘the concepts of maneuver warfare are evident throughout the Marine Corps’ and that efforts are being made ‘to further integrate the concepts of maneuver warfare and amphibious warfare.’”<sup>44</sup> The third driving factor was that as an amphibious force, the tenets of maneuver warfare resonated with the Marine Corps.

The manner in which *Warfighting* was written is extraordinary. Captain John Schmitt wrote it for the Commandant, and it was never staffed. In nearly every other case, doctrine and other Marine Corps-level publications went, and go, through extensive review at the action officer, colonel, and general officer levels across numerous organizations. The result is a consensus product that often lacks the power of a single voice. One of the few other publications that was not staffed is *Leading Marines*, written for the 35th Commandant, General James F. Amos.<sup>45</sup>

Captain John Schmitt arrived at the Doctrine Center aboard Marine Corps Base Quantico in 1986. At that time, the Doctrine Center was a backwater. Early on, Schmitt wrote Operational Handbook 6-1 (OH 6-1), *Ground Combat Operations*. As a former member of the 2d Marine Division under General Gray,

Captain Schmitt was a maneuver warfare zealot. As such, he laced the early drafts of *Ground Combat Operations* with references to maneuver warfare. At the time, there was opposition to maneuver warfare, since one of the key pro-maneuver warfare voices in the debate was William S. Lind, who was antagonistic and had written several articles critical of the Marine Corps and senior leaders. Many critics dismissed Lind's arguments, which included numerous examples drawn from the German approach to war (to include terminology associated with *blitzkrieg*—literally lightning war—such as *schwerpunkt*), since Germany had lost the war.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, maneuver warfare was facing extinction with the expected retirement of its main proponent, Lieutenant General Gray; Captain Schmitt was directed to remove references to maneuver warfare in *Ground Combat Operations*. However, when the dark-horse candidate, Gray, instead of retiring was announced as the next Commandant, Schmitt was directed to put maneuver warfare back in.<sup>47</sup>

Shortly after General Gray assumed his duties as Commandant, Schmitt briefed him on *Ground Combat Operations*, which was more of an encyclopedia or reference manual than a philosophy. What Schmitt did not realize at the time was that the briefing was an audition to write *Warfighting*. Up to this point, everyone assumed the author would be a colonel. With the passion of a zealot, Schmitt told the Commandant that it was all well and good to write a manual on maneuver warfare, but that if the Commandant were not willing to make the institutional investment in personnel, education, and training, it might as well be tossed in the trash. At this point in the conversation, Schmitt tossed his copy of *Ground Combat Operations* over his shoulder, where it landed—to his surprise—in a nearby trash can. Schmitt is convinced that is why he was selected to write *Warfighting*.<sup>48</sup>

The Commandant and Captain Schmitt met only twice over the 4–5 months it took to write *Warfighting*, but they were long sessions (one lasted 13 hours). During one discussion, Schmitt said he would, of course, start with the principles of war. General Gray asked him to which principles he was referring. Flabbergasted, Schmitt responded with MOOSEMUSS, the mnemonic device every Marine officer uses to remember the nine principles of war: mass, objective, offensive, security, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, surprise, and simplicity. General Gray responded, “Oh, those principles.” During that exchange, Schmitt realized he would need to be more creative and less conventional than regurgitating J. F. C. Fuller's principles of war. General Gray never gave Captain Schmitt direct guidance; instead, he gave his intent in the form of stories. Giving intent without directing how to accomplish the mission is in keeping with the concept of maneuver warfare. In writing *Warfighting*, Schmitt codified the results of years of discourse on the subject of maneuver warfare.<sup>49</sup>



Given its unconventional creation, it is natural to wonder about the quality of a doctrine that, in its printed form, measures 5.5 inches by 8 inches and is only 88 pages long (10 of which are endnotes). By either the realist or constructivist approach to evaluating doctrine discussed previously, *Warfighting* was successful.

According to Høiback, doctrine serves as a tool of education, a tool of command, and a tool of change. As a tool of education, *Warfighting* is touched on in whole or in part throughout the Marine Corps' continuum of professional military education (PME). It is used to teach junior Marines initiative, junior officers how to give intent, and senior officers strategy. One of the reasons *Warfighting* permeates PME is its applicability across the range of military operations. Since *Warfighting* focuses on *how* to think about war, rather than *what* to think, its concepts can be applied to both state-on-state conflict and counterinsurgency. Its applicability to state-on-state warfare is clear, since part of its genesis was to address the challenge of a smaller Marine force achieving victory over a larger Soviet force. What may be less clear to the casual reader is the applicability to military operations other than war. Captain Schmitt explained the applicability to counterinsurgency in a discussion of identifying critical factors: "Sun Tzu captured it very succinctly: 'Seize something he cherishes and he will conform to your desires.' The basic idea is the same. Attack the thing that will hurt the enemy most. 'Attacking' in this sense need not necessarily be destructive. It may actually be a constructive act, such as the Marine Corps Combined Action Program (CAP) in Vietnam."<sup>50</sup>

In a recent example, General Mattis, recognizing the 1st Marine Division faced a different kind of fight in 2004 than it faced nine months before during the drive to Baghdad, applied *Warfighting* principles to how he organized, prepared, and employed the division in Iraq. In an example of reorganization, he created a primary staff section that was responsible for information operations, civil military operations, and fire support.<sup>51</sup> He prepared his commanders and staff by issuing clear guidance on dealing with the Iraqi people, conducting a counterinsurgency symposium, and tailoring training to counterinsurgency. One of the many adjustments to TTP while conducting combat operations involved modifying counterbattery processes to limit civilian casualties when responding to indirect fire attacks.<sup>52</sup>

As a tool of command, *Warfighting* stresses the importance of clearly articulating intent, whether it be in mission-type orders or including purpose with every task. References to *Warfighting* are ubiquitous. It is referred to in the guidance promulgated by subsequent Commandants; in Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP 6-11), *Leading Marines*; and is quoted or mentioned in countless command philosophies.

As a tool of change, *Warfighting* achieved its initial purpose of transitioning the Marine Corps from an attritionist mindset to one of maneuver. Although the island-hopping campaign of World War II was maneuverist at the strategic level, tactical amphibious operations relied heavily on attritionist principles. Before landing, U.S. forces attempted to attrite the enemy through naval gun-fire bombardments and air strikes. Once ashore, Marines and soldiers suffered tremendous losses, as they defeated the enemy largely through sheer numerical advantage.

By adopting maneuver warfare, the Marine Corps changed its approach to amphibious operations. The influence of *Warfighting* is clearly evident in Marine Corps Concept Paper 1 (MCCP 1), *Operational Maneuver from the Sea* (OMFTS), dated 4 January 1996, and in *Ship-to-Objective Maneuver* (STOM), dated 25 July 1997, both of which apply the tenets of maneuver warfare to amphibious operations. The principles of *Operational Maneuver from the Sea* nest well within *Warfighting*:

- OMFTS focuses on an operational objective.
- OMFTS uses the sea as maneuver space.
- OMFTS generates overwhelming tempo and momentum.
- OMFTS pits strength against weakness.
- OMFTS emphasizes intelligence, deception, and flexibility.
- OMFTS integrates all organic, joint, and combined assets.<sup>53</sup>

When one applies Ångström and Widén's constructivist approach to assess doctrine in "reinforcing military identity and providing believers with ontological security," *Warfighting* fares quite well.<sup>54</sup>

The Marine Corps lost part of its identity as an amphibious, expeditionary force as it fought a protracted ground war in the mature theater of operations of Vietnam. *Warfighting* helped restore clarity to the identity (roles and missions) of the Marine Corps as an amphibious, expeditionary force. Amphibious operations, by their very nature, are all about maneuver. Tactically, amphibious forces seek to maneuver from ship to objective and bypass enemy strengths. Operationally, amphibious forces are well suited to serve as part of a campaign or as a theater reserve. Strategically, amphibious forces buy the national command authority decision space and give the nation its only sustainable joint forcible entry capability.

*Warfighting* is effective at providing Marines with ontological security. This effectiveness is due in large part to General Gray approaching *Warfighting* as a philosophy. The ability of *Warfighting* to permeate the Marine Corps without being staffed is due to the prominence of the position of its Service chief. The Marine Corps is unique among the armed forces of the United States. Perhaps

it is because there are only two four-star generals, the Commandant and the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, or perhaps it is due to Service culture—but when the Commandant speaks, the Corps speaks with the same voice. In the other Services, there are multiple four-stars representing multiple constituencies, which can result in a cacophony of voices.

*Warfighting*'s prominence is due in part to how the Marine Corps organizes its doctrine. When Lieutenant General Van Riper assumed command of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, he discovered there were more than 300 doctrinal publications, many of which had nothing to do with doctrine. Colonel Robert K. Dobson Jr. developed a tiered system of doctrinal publications in the Marine Corps. At the top were high-order doctrinal publications (MCDPs); the next tier covered tactics, techniques, and procedure (Marine Corps warfighting publications and an unlimited number of Marine Corps reference publications). As the preeminent doctrinal publication, *Warfighting* was redesignated MCDP 1 when it was rewritten in 1997.<sup>55</sup>

The Marine Corps had a long history of rich intellectual activities in developing doctrine in small wars, amphibious operations, and helicopterborne operations. During Vietnam and in the immediate years afterward, the Marine Corps passed through its version of the Dark Ages. *Warfighting* was the product of an intellectual renaissance that took place at Quantico. This renaissance was in part a function of its time, as General Gray described during a filmed February 2015 panel discussion: “When there’s no money available and it is really difficult fiscally, like it is going to be here in the coming years and like it was in 1970s; during the Carter administration we had no money in the Marine Corps. We had little to none after World War II, and we had little to none after Korea. Yet that is when some of our greatest innovative ideas took place, because it doesn’t cost any money to think.”<sup>56</sup>

*Warfighting* helped restore clarity to the identity, roles, and missions of the Marine Corps as an amphibious expeditionary force after a protracted ground war in the mature theater of operations of Vietnam. *Warfighting* also resonated with the Corps’ identity as an organization that carries out operations other than war. While its genesis lay in state-on-state warfare against a numerically superior foe, it was by design applicable to stability and counterinsurgency operations.

## Commonalities

While separated by half a century and shaped in very different geopolitical, technological, and fiscal realities, these two seminal works—the TLOM and *Warfighting*—have a number of features in common. Both doctrines were personally supervised and championed by the Commandant. While the landing manual was written not by a committee but by an entire school under the di-

rection of the commandant of schools, its development was monitored and the doctrine ultimately put into its final form with the guidance of Commandant Russell and the then-commandant of Marine Schools, Brigadier General Thomas Holcomb. *Warfighting* was even more directly linked with Commandant Gray, who—with Captain Schmitt—largely cocreated the manual. This approach is not typical of the doctrine creation process more broadly, which tends to take place over longer periods and to be conducted by committees and staffs.<sup>57</sup>

Both doctrines were crafted in response to a need for an institutional role, not simply in response to changes in the global environment or new threats. In the early twentieth century, the Marine Corps was threatened with the loss of a differentiating role. Its original mandate as shipborne infantry at the command of naval captains, and to assault from ship to ship, was becoming less relevant; and during the First World War, Marines were increasingly tasked as a second ground force.<sup>58</sup> The delineation of an amphibious role in the TLOM, within the context of a new strategic vision, gave it a place that was not only complementary to the capabilities of the Navy and Army, but also essential to victory. *Warfighting*, similarly, arose from a response to the nominal role of the Corps in the European theater in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which called for it to support the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's flanks in a possible war with the Soviets. While the early debate centered on choosing between remaining a strictly amphibious force—which would have little relevance in such a conflict—or *heavying up* by adopting tracked armor and guns—which would risk redefining the Corps as a second army—maneuver warfare proposed retaining the amphibious capability while adopting a doctrine that would make the Corps' comparative lack of heavy metal an asset.<sup>59</sup>

The TLOM and *Warfighting* are capability oriented, not threat oriented. While particular geostrategic issues informed the thinking of the doctrine writers, their products are meant to be valid across time and space, and not in one specific theater. To a large extent this has been the case. Principles from the TLOM informed the creation of the MAGTF, as well as amphibious operations in Korea and Vietnam; *Warfighting* has informed both the operations and the critique of the Iraq War.<sup>60</sup> Both emphasize the importance of the autonomy of local and junior leaders, and what could be called mission command, or mission tactics, although the specific terminology is not until the latter manual, and the explicit communications described in the TLOM are in part considered, optimally, to be implicit in *Warfighting*.

## Legacy

The TLOM created an identity for the Corps as expeditionary and amphibious, linked with, but not intrinsic to, naval operations, and quite distinct from the

role of the Army. *Warfighting* led to the entrenchment of maneuver warfare at all levels of training in the Corps and furthered this institutional identity. The TLOM succeeded in shaping the culture of the Corps to the extent that one analyst suggests it may have stymied mastery of other roles, drawing a connection between the inability to institutionalize Commandant Charles C. Krulak's reforms in the late 1990s and their tension with the amphibious role. The extent to which maneuver warfare informed Marine Corps operations in the twenty-first century is still contested. In the publications, instruction, and rhetoric of the Corps, it has left a clear and lasting imprint. One recent indication of the legacy of these two publications upon identity, as well as operations, is in the recently published *Marine Corps Operating Concept* (2016), in which language and concepts from manuals published in 1989 and 1934 often appear verbatim and fit seamlessly.

## Notes

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